DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 232 774 PS 013 761

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TITLE Corporal Punishment and Child Abuse: Some Observations and Relationships. Monograph Series No. 1:3/83.
INSTITUTION Childhelp U.S.A./International, Beaumont, CA.
PUB DATE Mar 83
NOTE 20p.
AVAILABLE FROM Childhelp U.S.A./International, 14700 Manzanita Park Road, P.O. Box 247, Beaumont, CA 92223 (Free of Charge). Originally presented at a Forum on Corporal Punishment in the Schools.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Abuse; *Child Neglect; *Corporal Punishment; *Government Role; Personal Narratives; *Public Policy; *Punishment

ABSTRACT

Various personal observations and experiences of a former director of the Office of Child Development and chief of the Children's Bureau are recounted in an informal discussion of punishment and child abuse. Several brief arguments focusing on the negative effects of punishment are offered, and contributions of the Children's Bureau to action supporting abused and neglected children are described. It is pointed out that efforts made by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect are being translated into practical staff-training sequences for persons working in Head Start and day care centers under the aegis of the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF). Particularly, a self-instructional text about abuse and neglect, intended for Head Start personnel, has been published. In addition, ACYF's efforts in parent education are being updated and refined to reflect the current state of the art and science about the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Concluding remarks point out that even though the United States Supreme Court ruled that corporal punishment may be used in American schools under certain well-controlled conditions, presently an enlightened break from the historical tradition of corporal punishment in the schools is occurring. (RH)

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Childhelp

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CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AND CHILD ABUSE: SOME OBSERVATIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

by: John H. Meier

PS 013761

Research Division

Monograph Series No. 1:3/83

14700 Manzanita Park Road
P.O. Box 247
Beaumont, CA 92223

March 1983

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The Research Division gratefully acknowledges the continued support of the entire CHILDHELP organization, especially the above-named Board Members, the Director of CHILDHELP, U.S.A./INTERNATIONAL, Alan Davis, and the Administrator of The Village Robert Lippert.

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R & D Division
March, 1983

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AND CHILD ABUSE: SOME OBSERVATIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS*

by John H. Meier

By way of introduction to my more formal remarks permit me to share a few observations and experiences from several levels of argument, which I have labelled with Latin phrases to give them a ring of tradition and legitimacy.

Ad hominem As a father of three children, a teacher and coach at all grade levels at one time or another, and a school psychologist, I have had numerous occasions to address the topic of discipline. Of course, the word discipline derives from disciple, which refers to a learner or a follower and not an enslaved subject. When I worked in the schools, I recall hearing discussions and advice about discipline, the most striking of which was given when several principals and seasoned teachers were advising a group of us student teachers that the best way to establish discipline was to identify the biggest and toughest kid in each class and take him outside of the classroom and work him over sufficiently to thereby prevent the necessity of any further

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*An edited and updated paper for the series of Occasional Papers available from the CHILDHELP R & D Division, Beaumont, California 92223. Originally presented at a Forum on Corporal Punishment in the Schools by John H. Meier, Ph.D., then Director of the U.S. Office of Child Development (now the Administration for Children, Youth and Families) and Chief of the U.S. Children's Bureau. Given at the American Psychological Association's 84th Annual National Convention, September 4, 1976, Washington, D.C.

corporal punishment--in other words, let everyone know who is "boss". I am proud to report that I never had to resort to this intimidation process to obtain and maintain the respect and cooperation of either my own or other people's children and adolescents, as family members, students, or athletes.

I can recall a high school judicial council which I chaired which never advocated corporal punishment for fellow high school students who transgressed a variety of school regulations or were in other ways delinquent. In fact the ingenuity with which this group of high school student leaders made punishments fit crimes was exceedingly appropriate and extraordinarily efficacious, even serving as a strong deterrent to future transgressions. The application of peer group sanctions especially with adolescents, was far more effective than the threat of corporal punishment by teachers and other authority figures, including parents. I remember some equally effective retributions levied against older students while I served in a faculty-advisory capacity for a Student Judicial Board at the University of Northern Colorado.

Ad absurdum It has always struck me as paradoxical that the punishment for truancy in many school systems is suspension or expulsion. In light of the statistics about Children Out of School in America, marshalled most cogently by the Children's Defense League (M.W. Edelman, et al., October, 1974), I wonder about whether we are dealing with drop-outs push-outs, or "punish-outs". The delinquency data also reveal that much of the vandalism in schools is done by those who have been driven from school, often for trivial and/or capricious reasons. Dr. Adah Mauer (Executive Director of the Committee to End Violence Against the Next Generation), who has so untiringly pioneered and persevered in the elimination of corporal punishment in the schools, speaks of a

David Copperfield syndrome as the classic example of beating the Dickens out of children, who in turn predictably employ similar techniques for managing/intimidating the weaker or undefended people in their world.

In order to avoid other absurdities, it will become necessary to clearly define corporal punishment, lest we get into another foolish prohibition, such as the interpretation that Title IX is against father-son or mother-daughter meetings in the schools since they are allegedly sexist. I suppose some overzealous parent or lawyer could call mandatory calisthenics in physical education corporal punishment if it induces pain and sore muscles. In these instances I would certainly hope that prudent-person principles would be invoked in the interpretation of calisthenics as corporal punishment. As you know, this Forum does not even address the more pernicious and pervasive use of sarcasm (verbal sadism) and other humiliating tactics which may further devastate the tender developing human psyche.

Ad nauseam My wife and I have both had the distinct privilege of working with Drs. Ruth and C. Henry Kempe and their many fine associates responsible for their multifaceted programmatic efforts against child abuse and neglect at the C. Henry Kempe National Center for Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect in Denver, Colorado. It can indeed be nauseating to study the subject of the battered child. One may learn to appreciate the symbolic cries for help from troubled families, which employ such repugnant and counter-productive responses to scapegoat powerless children for their own frustrations or repeat what they themselves experienced in the same circumstances. Nevertheless, when appropriate intervention or prevention is instituted, the response by the previously assaulting adults and the newly emancipated children can indeed by heartening. The empathy of all of us working with abusing parents is often enhanced when we reflect upon the

transgenerational aspects of child abuse and realize that most of our clients were being battered themselves a few years previously and that most of them love their children very much, just not very well.

Ex scripturis Of course we have all heard the old adage "spare the rod and spoil the child". Most people attribute these words to the Bible, thus implying that this is God's advice for disciplining children, when in fact this phrase was written by Shakespeare who accurately reflected the demeaning yet prevalent practice of caning used to punish English school children. There was even the original "rule of thumb", which prescribed that the cane or rod could be no larger in diameter than the victim's thumb. It is true that in the Old Testament, wherein an "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" guided the administration of justice, there are passages in Proverbs stating, "He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (13:24); "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him" (22:15); and "The rod and reproof give wisdom; but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" (29:15). The term "rod" is quite ambiguous and Biblical scholars state that the Hebrew word for rod is shebet which means a leader's symbol of authority as suggested in the 23rd Psalm, "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me". A rod is also a unit of land measurement (16.5 feet) and as such may symbolize setting boundaries for children's behavior or standards against which their performance is measured. Unfortunately some overzealous advocates of corporal punishment believe that it is their God-given duty to literally beat the devil or original sin out of children. Some parents get carried away and enlarge the gentle swat or spank on the bottom to violent beatings with various implements applied all over the body; with educators, the proverbial rod becomes

a 4 foot long, 6 inch wide, 1 inch thick wooden paddle with holes drilled in it to reduce air resistance and raise welts--euphemistically referred to as the board of education.

The more gentle and humane advice of the New Testament encourages one to "do unto others as you would have others do unto you" or more empathically, as others would have you do unto them. Obedience of authority, whether it be parents or others is reciprocal, based upon mutual respect not paralyzing fear or resentful hostility and retaliation as suggested by the passage:

> "Children, the right thing for you to do is to obey your parents as those whom God has set over you. The first commandment to contain a promise was: 'Honour thy father and thy mother that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest live long on the earth'. Fathers, don't over-correct your children or make it difficult for them to obey the commandment. Bring them up with Christian teaching in Christian discipline" (Ephesians 6:1-4).

Just as Christ's or Mohammed's or Ghandi's disciples followed them out of love and respect, children and youth can be lead and disciplined similarly.

Ad scientiam It is now clear from both a neobehavioristic and phenomenological perspective that any kind of punishment should at best be the very last resort for modifying behavior. The overwhelming evidence would seem to make it obligatory upon scientists in the behavioral sciences to take a stand in opposition to corporal punishment in the schools or elsewhere. This is not to deny that, pragmatically speaking, punishment does work under some carefully controlled conditions, which are

highly unlikely to be met in the typically irrational and violent corporal punishment situation. When the preponderance of literature to date (ERIC Search, 1976) reveals better alternatives and a massive number of court actions have opposed such cruel and unusual tactics, it seems ridiculous to champion such physical punishment, which typically degrades both the punisher and the punishee. With the aforementioned in mind, I personally and whole heartedly endorse the resolution of the American Psychological Association's task force on the Rights of Children and Youth to abolish corporal punishment in the schools and eventually in the home, as Sweden has done.

Many negative side effects of corporal punishment have been documented by Wilson (1980) and include such findings as: (1) an increase in negative behaviors when punishment for those behaviors discontinued (Johnson, 1972; Lovaas and Simmons, 1969; and Risley, 1968); (2) an increase in such behaviors as truancy, tardiness, and drop-outs--the very behaviors being "corrected" (Azrin and Holz, 1966) and; (3) serious depression, anxiety and phobias (Brady, 1958; Meier, 1959; Solomon and Wayne, 1954; and Walters and Grusec, 1977).

Ex officio Although OCD (ACYF) does not have an official role to play with respect to the schools in the United States, its traditional advocacy role in behalf of the rights of children certainly attracts the generic interest of the agency. I am pleased to report that in accordance with one of my recommendations as outgoing Director of the Office of Child Development (OCD), informed by my experience and several advisors, the OCD's name and authority was changed to the Administration for Children, Youth and Families (ACYF), to better enable it to include and address the critical issues of family development, not the least of which is discipline (Meier, 1978).

Furthermore as Chief of the Children's Bureau, which was established in 1912 by President Taft to address all public issues which impact upon children, I would daresay that it is most appropriate for our bureaucratic attention to be focused on such issues as corporal punishment against children, regardless of where it occurs. The Children's Bureau's history is an illustrious one in light of its aggressive concern for child welfare down through the decades. A noteworthy example is represented in its central role in establishing child labor laws to protect children from another form of inhumane treatment and exploitation.

Consistent with its advocacy and investigatory-reporting role regarding the status and welfare of the nation's children, the Children's Bureau contracted with Professor David Gil for a 5-year study of violence against children, which he conducted during the years 1965-1969 and resulted in a now classic report by the same title, Violence Against Children (Gil, 1970).

In addition to raising the public consciousness about the plight of many children, and in large part dispelling the myth that America is a child-centered nation, the germinal works of Gelles (1972), Gil (1970), Kempe and Helfer (1968) and numerous others laid the foundation for the creation of Public Law 93-247, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act. This legislation was enacted in 1974 to provide research, demonstration and training funds for the study, prevention, and treatment of child abuse and neglect. This legislation and its appropriation of nearly 60 million dollars to be used during an initial 3-year period has enabled the newly formed National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (one of many important segments in the U.S. Children's Bureau) to initiate a wide variety of studies and demonstration efforts focused on child abuse and neglect in family settings. NCCAN was primarily concerned with children who are being or are at high risk

of being abused or neglected by their primary caregivers, against whom they previously had no defense nor legal redress. This remarkably small amount of money and the unwarranted opinion that children who suffer abuse or neglect in non-residential settings will be championed by their parents or other primary caregiver(s) originally precluded NCCAN's addressing abuse and neglect in non-residential settings such as the schools.

More recently, however, NCCAN has been reauthorized several times and widened its focus to all settings, prompting many publications and national conferences which address specific aspects of child abuse such as: residential care (Harrell and Orem, 1980); state reporting laws (Alderman, 1978); community coordination (Calhoun, 1980); sexual abuse (Roth, 1979); volunteers (Fisher, 1979); neglect (Hally, Polansky and Polansky, 1980); child protection (Ragan, Salus and Schultze, 1980); family violence (Barnett, Pittman, Ragan and Salus, 1980); and, the role of the courts (Landau, Salus and Stiffarm, 1980) to name a few.

It has been argued that such child abuse and neglect legislation would not even be necessary if the strict legal interpretation of assault were uniformly applied in all circumstances for all ages in all States. On the other hand, since model child abuse and neglect legislation is now available and being adopted by the States, there are numerous other settings, such as schools, to which the legislative intent could be specifically extended. Since OCD's role as a federal agency is that of executing the congressional intent, we must of necessity await directions from Congress as to whether or not the current child abuse and neglect act or future versions thereof should be interpreted to cover corporal punishment in the schools or other institutional settings, where parental and guardian advocacy and protection were presumed. The extant legislation has served as an

edge of a wedge into the public awareness about traumatized children's needs and it is hoped that this knowledge will in turn further arouse public consciousness about the importance of the next generation (upon whom we spend less than 10% of the Federal budget, who represent 40% of the population, albeit non-voting, and 100% of our future).

What we learn from the Children's Bureau NCCAN efforts on child abuse and neglect is being translated into practical staff training sequences for persons working in the numerous Head Start and day care centers under the aegis of the OCD (ACYF). The data we have analyzed as well as what has been reported by others on this Forum, indicate that not only corporal punishment in the schools but also child abuse and neglect are apparently more prevalent in lower socio-economic settings. Thus, it is of particular importance for ACYF's nearly 50,000 Head Start employees and countless volunteers to be trained to recognize and appropriately report abuse and neglect among the nearly 400,000 impoverished children in these compensatory and child advocacy programs each year. On the day before my previously filed resignation was automatically accepted by the new incoming administration, I signed a Policy Instruction for the National Head Start Program on the Identification and Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect (Meier, 1977), which spelled out most of the details. I am pleased to report that this Policy Instruction led to the publication of a Self-Instructional Text for Head Start Personnel regarding child abuse and neglect, an excellent example of cooperation between the two major subdivisions of ACYF, the Head Start Bureau and the Children's Bureau. This is a refreshing exception to the traditional bureaucratic definition as a mammoth machine for converting creature energy into solid waste (for which there are now additional disposal problems).

Furthermore, ACYF's rather extensive efforts in parent education are also being updated and refined to reflect the current state of the art and science about the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Providing new and prospective parents with constructive alternatives in the management of the behavior and development of young children is a major effort now underway. ACYF's overall emphasis upon competency-based training of Head Start staff will eventually extend to all of its training efforts including for day care center staff, persons working with children in hospitals or institutions, and, it is hoped, for parents and their surrogates.

It is hereby submitted that one of the most promising means of preventing recidivism of child abuse or ensuring maintenance of positive behavioral management is a concerted effort to equip parents and others who give care to children with a wide variety of alternative and effective child management procedures. It has been frequently observed that one of the most prevalent etiological factors in the use of abuse or other forms of corporal and mental punishment is an ignorance of alternatives. People teach as they were taught, parent as they were parented, and, yes, discipline as they were disciplined.

The participation of Professor Emeritus Skinner on this Forum is eloquent testimony to his inspiration for and major contributions to the development and empirical validation of a wide variety of humane alternatives to the relatively inhumane and certainly last resort application of corporal punishment or other aversive control of human behavior. I am personally pleased to have suggested his participation and am deeply gratified that his frequently maligned contributions to neobehaviorism are being properly recognized as stemming from a sophisticated understanding of and commitment to the most humane means

of managing human behavior. An emphasis on positive rewarding of desirable behavior can be translated to say, "catch a child being good and reinforce that with something the child likes". I would daresay that all of us here today are relatively self-disciplined, intentionally managing our own contingencies, and would advocate the learning of such internal controls for our children, especially as opposed to external violent and punitive controls and intimidation.

In an issue of FOCUS (National Council on Children and Youth, 1976), it was stated that sound development and implementation of suspension and expulsion procedures, coupled with creative educational options reduces student violence and vandalism in the schools, whereas a policy of corporal punishment is related to an increase in violence and vandalism. I understand that the National Institute of Education is now sponsoring a major study of school vandalism, which should yield many additional insights into this behavior, its causes and costs. It goes on to suggest that positive reinforcement of acceptable alternative behavior and predictable consistency are the best approaches for enduring more acceptable student behavior. It has become clear that punishment does work, especially when the punisher is present or instills some lasting sense of guilt and/or other related psychological hang-ups which operate in the punisher's absence. Unfortunately, the punishment only tells the victim what not to do but in no way informs him/her about what to do. Some forty-two alternative means of managing discipline in a classroom were published by the National Education Association (1976).

Such guidelines are not only consistent with contemporary behavioral management theory and practice but also augur well for a less violent future society, as the next generation assumes control of the weapons and other systems of violence which have marked and defiled the historical evolution of mankind.

Furthermore, the adoption of NCCAN's model Child Abuse and Neglect law by states in accordance with whatever statutes are currently on their respective books marks a major advance in behalf of children's welfare thoughout this country. The adoption of the adapted model law throughout the United States will help ensure that children will in fact have a more equitable and civilized kind of treatment from parents, guardians, other prime caregivers, and agencies such as schools.

Although it is erroneously believed that child abuse and neglect is inflicted largely upon very small children, mounting and mountainous data daily reveal that it happens to children of all ages, a startling percentage of whom are teenagers. By then the reciprocity has begun to emerge in its full-blown form as witnessed by reports of teacher battering and parent battering (including cases of children murdering their parents in self-defense). In retrospect it seems ironic indeed that, shortly after this Bicentennial forum was presented in 1976 at the American Psychological Association's 84th Annual Convention, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of corporal punishment in American schools under certain well-controlled conditions (Lee, 1979).

Regardless of this unfortunate and anachronistic court ruling, an enlightened break from the historical tradition of corporal punishment in the schools is occurring. The primitive practice is increasingly being replaced, not by the equally ineffective alternative of licentious permissiveness, but by more scientific and humane non-punitive alternatives to the management of human behavior. Such advancements in the art and science of education and parenting are most helpful in advancing ACYF's (and CHILDHELP's) prime mission of promoting and facilitating overall optimum child and adolescent growth and development (physical, mental, and spriritual) in the U.S. and throughout the world.

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